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BETHEL HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Marion True Gehring (1850-1937)

SOME MEMORABLE BETHEL WOMEN FROM THE EARLIEST DAYS TO 1930

By Margaret Joy Tibbetts

Editor's Note: The author wishes to thank Elizabeth Mason Carter, Margaret Herrick Oakes, Nina Crouse, Barbara Lyon Kuzyk, Rebecca Bailey and Barbara Heath Whitman for helping gather memories for this article. In addition, she was greatly assisted in the project by the late Ruth Carver Ames.

One article cannot possibly mention all Bethel women who deserve special consideration. The names which I include are only some of the women — a very few — who impressed their contemporaries with their strong characters and who contributed to making Bethel the town which we know today. I hope others will be encouraged to preserve recollections and records of their own kinsmen and kinswomen as well as their friends; personal memories are precious and very fleeting, but we can learn much from our predecessors.

Obviously from the very beginning, more than 200 years ago, there have been in Bethel as elsewhere strong and admirable women. Even in the almost completely male dominated world of the 18th and 19th centuries not all men were more intelligent or more capable than all women although the law was written as if that were the case. Probably a good number of the prosperous achievers chronicled in Lapham's *Bethel History* owed a great deal to shrewd and supportive wives and mothers.

In the *Bethel History*, however, women appear almost incidentally. Mollyockett's prominence could not be denied since she was certainly the Oxford County Indian best known then as well as today. Mrs. Jonathan Clark's fearlessness in resisting the Indians' attempts to take her beads and shoe buckles during the 1781 Indian Raid frightened the local men but the Indians did not harm her. Lapham also tells of Hannah Chapman who in 1790 rode alone on horseback from Massachusetts to what is now Northwest Bethel "through almost unbroken forest" says the account. What colossal courage and resourcefulness a trip like that must have taken; but the family apparently took it for granted. Probably tribute should also be paid to Hannah's mother who during that winter of 1789-1790 kept house in a log cabin with a dirt floor which must have been most uncomfortable on one of those January days when the temperature is well below zero.

Hardships were taken for granted by both men and women, however, and for women as well as men life was difficult. Housework was time-consuming and heavy work. Cooking, cleaning and laundry involved grappling with wood fires, struggling to heat water, trying to coax uncertain ovens to an even heat, and heating the old fashioned irons on the top of the stove. Yet the standards of housekeeping were very high with less tolerance of neglected jobs than today. Until the 1920s brought the refrigerator, the electric stove, the washing machine and the electric iron few household aids really helped much. A few women in Bethel had some assistance from hired girls, but for almost all women just keeping their homes decent and comfortable took considerable effort day in and day out.

It is difficult to know much about individual women until the second half of the 19th century brings us within reach of oral tradition. One of the early women in Bethel to develop a career for herself and to gain the respect of a large number of her fellow citizens was Mary True. She was a daughter (by his first marriage) of Dr. Nathaniel True who lived at the upper end of Broad Street. Dr. True was an educator of State-wide reputation, the Headmaster who made the early Gould Academy a viable institution. He also taught and worked elsewhere in the State and was a man of wide interests, an enthusiastic temperament which made him a splendid communicator with a keen mind. To him we owe most of our information about the origins of Bethel and the first settlers.

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**EAST BETHEL ROAD IS EXPECTED TO BECOME
AVAILABLE DURING THE SUMMER OF 1985.**

*Until that time it is still possible to order and receive the
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*Pre-publication price \$35
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Mary True was born in 1845. In the early 1860s she was on the Common one day when Mr. and Mrs. Hubbard, guests from the Bethel House (one of the predecessors of the Bethel Inn) came by with their little daughter. The little girl was deaf. Mary True had a little brother, John, who was deaf and probably this was helpful to her in making friends with the little girl. In any case, she so impressed Mr. and Mrs. Hubbard that when they completed their stay in Bethel they took Mary True back with them as a companion and later teacher for their daughter. Through the Hubbards Mary True was given training in dealing with the deaf and deaf mutes at Massachusetts training schools. For years she stayed with the Hubbards until their daughter was married (to Alexander Graham Bell). For a time Mary True taught at the Northampton School for the Deaf and in addition she lived and worked in other families as a private teacher for deaf-mute children. She travelled widely abroad in the course of her career and enjoyed an excellent professional reputation.

In 1897 Mary True retired to Bethel and for the last twenty-five years of her life she lived here and kept house for her brother, Alfred. Mary True's contribution to Bethel lay less in what she did locally than in what she was. Bethel people were proud of her attainment and liked her unpretentious and natural approach. Mary True's intellectual and moral standards were high. She is one of those early Broad Street citizens who left a legacy of interest in and appreciation of intellectual achievement which has been of considerable local influence.

Mary Chase Herrick, the wife of Judge Addison E. Herrick, was to play a more active role in the development of Bethel's institutions than Mary True whom she knew well. She came to Bethel from Blue Hill after her marriage in 1882. Judge Herrick was a lawyer of distinction and Superior Court Judge. He was for many years a Bethel leader and together with Mrs. Herrick was much liked and admired. Mrs. Herrick was in her own way as well-known and respected as the Judge. She was a woman of high intelligence and strong cultural interests. She encouraged the local women to take an interest in matters beyond their own domestic concerns; my mother always said that one of Mrs. Herrick's great contributions was that, unlike many women, Mrs. Herrick was not afraid to be intelligent (in an era in which many women thought it somehow more ladylike to defer to the masculine mind). For my mother Mrs. Herrick's approach was a tremendous role model.

Mrs. Herrick made a lasting contribution to the Bethel Library. In fact, she probably built even better than she knew, for much of the popularity of the Bethel Library through the years has come from her work. She set high standards, and to the extent possible the early Library trustees acquired a reputable collection. Of great importance was that she never lost sight of the fact that to be useful to the average Bethel citizen the Library must be a Bethel Library, not a pleasant side interest of the increasing numbers of well-to-do summer people who had been drawn to Bethel by the Gehring Clinic. Here her vision was very clear indeed, and her tenacity served Bethel well. The Library is not and never has been as well-funded as we would like but it enjoys wide local popularity and has remained a completely local institution, and thus in the long run a more useful one.

Mrs. Herrick's wit was enchanting and just to be with her gave my parents a lift. No one has ever contributed more to the lifting of local aims and the broadening of local horizons. She died in 1936.

The importance of Mrs. Herrick's tenacity in maintaining the local character of the Library stands out clearly in considering the influence of Mrs. Gehrings who was a dominant figure on the local scene during the same period, roughly 1890 to about

1930. Mrs. Gehring was a daughter of Dr. True's second marriage, born in 1850 as Susan Maria True; she later preferred to be known as Marion True Gehring. After graduating from Gould Academy she left Bethel, married in 1880 a Dr. Farnsworth, and after his death married in 1888 a Cleveland physician, Dr. John Gehring, and returned to Bethel. For many years Dr. Gehring conducted the Gehring Clinic at the upper end of Broad Street, the present property of the National Training Laboratory. During the period of the Gehring Clinic it was a beautifully maintained property with gardens, walks and lovely grounds; the Gehring Clinic had a high reputation as an effective and attractive place for the treatment of nervous disorders.

The majority of those who came to the Clinic were well-to-do and many became very fond of Bethel. The outstanding example was William Bingham II, an exceptionally wealthy and kind man, who made Bethel his home for many years. In time Mr. Bingham's contributions were to change the town to a considerable degree. Given Mrs. Gehring's interests and personality and Mr. Bingham's shy nature, it is only natural that his contributions for many years reflected her influence. Basically, the town owes much of its present character and physical beauty to Mr. Bingham's gifts, all the magnificent Gould campus.

Mrs. Gehring's personality was strong. She had all of the True intelligence and charm with strong cultural interests. She was an excellent conversationalist but she was never as popular locally as her father and sister had been, perhaps because many local people were intimidated by her grand manner and the elegance in which she lived. She was an exception among Bethel women in that she had a number of servants which made it possible for her to follow a different pattern of living. She took a strong interest in Gould Academy and wrote the Headmaster often about the importance of social training for Gould students; she followed through with invitations to her home which for some students were marvelous experiences and for others a form of torture. She lectured the Ladies Club of the Congregational Church, an exceptionally well-behaved and polite group, on manners, and they listened meekly without reminding her that the process of making and returning formal calls is less easy when you are preoccupied with getting your husband's meals or finishing the children's laundry. There was always an air of relaxation in the Ladies Club when Mrs. Gehring left for Florida in the autumn. It is a mystery to me how so intelligent a woman could have so misread sentiment in a town where she had been born and raised; a more relaxed and natural style would have greatly increased her influence.

Nevertheless her influence was strong and she probably loved Bethel deeply. Certainly none of us would be happy in Bethel without the beautiful Gould campus, and in our way we are all proud of the Bethel Inn. We also remember fondly the many pleasant friendships developed over the years between local people and the summer visitors who came as patients and guests of the Gehrings and who in some cases stayed for life.

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, women were becoming more active in local affairs, probably because they were willing to do the work. It was becoming more usual also for women to follow careers, if not always for life at least before marriage. In Mary True's footsteps teachers of the deaf were the three Carter sisters, Grace, Frances and Florence, all professionally trained. Grace Carter spent much of her life in wealthy families teaching children and eventually retired to Bethel with her former pupil, Catherine Seaton Frances. Carter taught at the Baxter School for the Deaf for many years.

FAYE TAYLOR MEMORIAL ART SHOW
MAY 25 — 10 - 4
Dr. Moses Mason's 196th Birthday Party
MAY 26 — 2 - 4 P.M.

Many women served as teachers, in some cases almost for a lifetime. Ethel Bisbee was to become one of our best known local personalities, teaching for more than forty years. Like teaching the nursing career was overwhelmingly dominated by women; they were busy, some in hospitals, others going out in private practice. Women were also beginning to work more in offices. One of the best known was Cleo Russell who eventually became Postmistress in the late 1920s at a time when there were even fewer women postmistresses than today. Cleo was much respected; she exemplified the old doctrine that a woman had to be much more competent than the men to get ahead.

In conclusion, I mention a woman who was well and favorably known by virtually everyone in town for her fine character, high standards and unremitting hard work. Annie Heath was born in Bethel in 1868 of the Bennett family one of Gilead's old families. She married Charles Heath and lived most of her life on High Street in the home her family eventually owned, now the property of Ruth Lord. Charles Heath was a laborer, and Annie Heath worked almost to the end of her life doing washing and ironing, cleaning in homes and offices and on occasion baby sitting in the evening. She was a fine, meticulous worker and was always busy. She was lean and dark and I remember her as walking quickly, almost running, from one house to the next, serving, and her various jobs. Among school children she had a wide reputation for her ability to charm away warts, and there were documented stories of her successes. She was immensely kind, generous and respected everywhere for her integrity. Truly her spirit was of high quality. Because of her kindness and strong character she was a source of support to many. Among her odd jobs was tending the tramps in the lockup across the street for which the town paid her a pittance. Out of her own hard earned resources she invariably gave those poor creatures coffee and donuts in the morning before they left.

It was through Annie Heath's efforts that the Steam Mill (Grover Hill) cemetery, located beside Gayland Dooen's home, was prevented from falling into decay and eventual loss. There was no cemetery association and for years the preservation of the cemetery depended upon Annie Heath's efforts in organizing volunteers and enlisting the services of her grandson to keep it mowed and in relatively good order. She kept after the town officials on the point, and on her own enlisted lawyer Henry Hastings' help. Finally, the town adopted a motion of support and has maintained the cemetery since; it is a fine looking facility with a number of Bethel's old families represented there. It was typical of Annie Heath that hard work and hard times did not stop her from looking beyond herself and her immediate concerns. With few resources except her own strong character she contributed to the community in her way.

All of these women in different ways rose above the limitations set upon women at that time and used their abilities well. They were fortunate to have been born with intelligence and energy, but their contributions went beyond that. In each case their standards were high in what they did and they used their abilities well.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

1985 promises to be a very busy year at the Dr. Moses Mason House with a wide variety of special exhibits and programs planned. Further details will be announced in later issues of the Courier.

The Society has reached another significant milestone in its development with over 600 members now on the rolls from 29 states, Washington, DC, the Virgin Islands and the Canadian provinces of Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec.

Alden T. Kennett

THE BETHEL AGRICULTURAL FAIR AND RIVERSIDE PARK

By Yvonne B. Nowlin

Editor's Note: The first half of this article appeared in the last issue.

A quick glance at the news reported during the operation of the following year's fair, '99 had the usual "mid-way" attractions. The old church, which had been used as an exhibition hall for the past nine years, was filled to capacity with the usual exhibits. "Guaranteed to fit and waterproof", gaiters, dress skirts, "macintoshes", jackets and capes for all were exhibited for the first time by H. A. Hallowell. Booths furnishing popcorn, soda pop, frankfurts and "light drinks" were numerous. Bethel fair was always noted for its good horses and this year was no exception. It was stated that one day's attendance exceeded that of any other day in the history of Riverside Park.

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IN MEMORIAM

Died, January 1, 1985, Emma Tewksbury, Kerrville, Texas, patron member.

Died, February 20, 1985, Ruth Carver Ames, Bethel, life member and generous donor.

Died, April 9, 1985, Ina P. Mundt, Bethel, sustaining member since 1980.

NEW LIFE MEMBERS

Gertie F. Bartlett, Bethel, is the Society's oldest member at age 97.

Patricia C. Dooen, Bethel, is a member of the Board of Selectmen/Assessors.

W. Sidney Howe, Belfast, is a Bethel native and a 1941 graduate of Gould Academy.

SOCIETY OFFICERS AND TRUSTEES

Alden T. Kennett, President; Marvin Ouwinga, Vice President; Theresa C. Judson, Secretary and Clerk of the Trustees; Margaret Joy Tibbetts, Treasurer; Trustees: Willard Wight, Persis Post, Ruth Wight, Donald Bennett, and Mary Keniston.

The fair of 1900 seems to have been as successful, in general, as any of those of the past. The fact that local papers announced that the Grand Trunk Railroad was to run a special train each of the two evenings the fair was held provides an indication of the crowds that were making Bethel their destination. Of special interest to Society members is the fact that Cyrene Littlehale, the niece of Dr. and Mrs. Moses Mason, had on display in the old Mayville Church, a collection of items connected with her prominent relatives. Among these were a pair of stays reputedly one hundred and fifty years of age, a chair two hundred years old, a red cloak of the same age, the dress, bonnet and shawl worn by Mrs. Moses at the inauguration of President Andrew Jackson, as well as the portraits of Dr. Mason and his wife, all prominently featured in the hall. Though usually devoted to agricultural produce, locally built items such as the Bethel Manufacturing Company's chairs, tables, tete-tetes, and couches "in the latest styles" were also on display.

Early in 1901 an article appeared in the *Bethel News* which shed light on the use of the Mayville Church as the Riverside Park exhibit hall. One reporter wrote:

The white steeple of the Garland meetinghouse with the dark mountain side for a background, presented a picturesque landscape view. Forty years' passing have wrought a change in the situation. Father time has wrought a dilapidating and demoralizing work on the church edifice, but the name "Garland" is perpetuated in the Parish House annex.

The 1901 agricultural fair seems to have been smaller due to bad September weather, several lists of displays and mid-way exhibitors indicates how widespread was the geographic area represented by the participants. F. W. Albee had his "victuallers tent," the People's Clothing Store of Rumford had a large display, W. L. O'Connor of Percy, N. H. had a lunch counter, and a Dr. Drew was advertising Woodfords electric belts. Carrying people from the village to the fairgrounds in "ten cent carriages" were George Ryerson, Harry Plaisted, George Swain and Isaiah Coburn. Gerald Smith could be found taking tickets at the main gate, while the Bethel Band, considered by one observer as "one of the best bands in western Maine," furnished music on the grounds.

Within the exhibit hall, the most intriguing display was no doubt one of gas lights powered by an Angell Acetylene Generator. The *News* called this "one of the best and cheapest lights on the market." This particular exhibit was given by C. W. Wyman of Gorham, N.H.

Events having to do with the next year's fair remained encouraging and only a few will be cited here. Under an article which began "No stone will be left unturned to bring to Riverside Park all the component parts which go to make up a first class fair," appeared news of the expected success of the trotting events. In addition, "the best showing of livestock in years" greeted the many visitors to the grounds. In the old church, new items on exhibit were hand carved picture frames, made by William Ames, hand painted China by Laura C. Hall, and drawing lessons given by Alice Billings.

One unusual event, a "grand fair ball" was given at Odeon Hall in the Cole Block during one of the evenings of the fair. Given under the auspices of the officers of the Riverside Park Association, the ball was provided music by Plummer's Brigade Band of Lewiston. It was reported, however, that "not many people attended."

The thirteenth annual fair at Riverside Park (1903) was anticipated as being one of the largest fairs held in Bethel, but the lack of published accounts hints that the fair may not have

come up to its former standards. Though racing events attracted a crowd, one account in the *News* simply stated that the "agricultural display was not as large as usual this year."

The tradition already begun which allowed the use of the fairgrounds for outside groups continued when races were held in early August of 1904 and baseball games (one between the Lockes Mills and West Bethel teams) were "side attractions." Interestingly, the Gilead Band provided music between the races. It should also be pointed out that at the same time the Riverside Park activities were taking place, many local fairs were being operated, in addition to the larger county fairs at Norway/South Paris, Fryeburg and Andover. On August 24, 1904, the *News* reported that the West Bethel Fair held at "Grover's Birches" had recently attracted over three hundred people.

When the fair of 1904 was held, the Riverside Park Association offered an extra premium of \$100. on draft horses, "an opportunity the likes of which were never known at Riverside Park before." Little wonder that Bethel, in weeks after this particular fair was being called "One of the horse centers of western Maine."

Of the interesting particulars of the 1904 fair (held on October 4-5), the *News* reported a fortune teller, an exhibit by the Bethel Creamery Company with Mrs. H. S. Hastings, Mrs. Eli Barker, Mrs. E. A. Capen and Mrs. O. H. Spearin exhibiting butter. Also featured were a high-diving dog which leaped from a thirty foot ladder onto a canvas set up before the grandstand, and the Dixfield Brass Band, which played during both days the fair was held. Though the exhibits in the hall were not as numerous as in the past and the local granges did not participate, "the usual array of fakers and dime catchers were in line."

Though the three day fair of 1905 was announced well before it took place on September 26-28, a number of changes were taking place that would soon alter the course of Riverside Park's future. Charles Ryerson, who operated the old Mason homestead (on which the fairgrounds was situated) as a boarding house or hotel, died in 1901 and was buried in nearby Riverside Cemetery. While Mrs. Ryerson obviously carried on, aided by her young son George, it probably came as no surprise when people read of the sale of the farm in the September 6th issue of the *Bethel News*. The notice concluded that "upon the farm is a trotting course of the Riverside Park Association which, with all buildings, goes with the farm."

Despite such news (and the urging by the Association's officers for the public to do its part in keeping the fair alive) the event was held as scheduled, to the tune of "good crowds and good trotting."

In 1906, the fair at Bethel was seen as a great success. Wrote the *News* reporter, "the shriek of fakers, the whistle and hum of the merry-go-round, the tramp of hoof and the toot of the automobile, and the hum of many voices made a perfect pandemonium." The pulpit of the old Mayville Church, from which the Reverend David Garland had so long preached, was used to form an archway "which added much to the Bear River Grange display." Despite these notes of optimism, the newspaper noted that the exhibits were not as large as in previous years. The majority of articles on the fair carried details of the many races and the prizes awarded during them.

Only the sporadic notices of the fair of 1907 appeared in the local papers. Again, the exhibits appeared not to be as large as those of the past. One of the most "attractive" exhibits, however, was a snowshoe display exhibited by Seth L. Mason of

Northwest Bethel. Of this the local reporter observed, "He showed nine pair of completed snowshoes and three frames."

The agricultural fair of 1908 was the last to be held in what we might term the "heyday" of Bethel's Riverside Park. At this, the eighteenth exhibition of the "Bethel Fair and Cattle Show," the days saw excellent weather and large crowds of people. A highlight of the fair was the "Florida Animal Zoo" where were exhibited a nine-and-a-half foot alligator weighing three hundred and ninety pounds, a seven foot rattle snake, and a cage of prairie dogs. During this same fair the races and other "interesting things" were captured on film by a photographer who planned to make post cards of the scenes.

Anyone researching the history of Riverside Park after 1908 can easily become entangled in the rapid change of ownership as the actual fair ended and the fair grounds itself began to be used for other purposes. To those unfamiliar with the earlier history of the fair, the name of William Rogers Chapman is synonymous with the present Norseman Inn (the former Mason farm) which Chapman owned as one of his several Bethel residences.

An article appearing in an 1892 edition of the *Lewiston Journal* spoke of Chapman's "track" laid out by himself on part of his farm. According to his location at that time, this would place the track behind his home then, the present Dorothy Fadner house in Mayville. As the Riverside Park trotting track was laid out on Mason family property in 1890, one might ask whether Mayville contained two trotting tracks in the 1890s. In any case, Chapman seems to have been the owner, at one time, of hundreds of acres of land in and around Mayville and a closer look at deeds of several Mayville properties might clear up any uncertainties. In 1895, Chapman announced the sale of his "stock farm" in Mayville, described in the *Bethel News* two years earlier with its stables housing fancy trotters, brood mares and "youngsters."

Mrs. Charles (Ellen) Ryerson died in 1911 and "Professor" Chapman, then a well-known musician and founder of the highly successful Maine Music Festival, soon purchased the old Mason homestead and its expansive property, including the entire fairgrounds. In July of 1912, several months after the purchase, the Maine Music Festival picnic, by then an annual event hosted in Bethel by Chapman, was held on the grounds. During the following year's picnic, an extensive account of the event appeared in the *Oxford County Citizen* (later *Bethel Citizen*) under the title of "The Old Shack." This rather distasteful label for one of Bethel's more venerable landmarks brought a response in the paper from Thirzar Mason Stone, a younger sister of Moses A. Mason, the former owner. Of the massive house she wrote:

Over this transaction I have shed many bitter tears. That my home has passed from the Mason ownership into other hands and from the Mason name forever was hard to realize. "Professor" Chapman, despite such sentiments, continued the alteration of the Mason property, already much changed under the Ryerson ownership.

The period of Chapman's ownership saw major developments on this, one of Bethel's oldest-settled properties. Chapman had the Northwest Bethel road repositioned from between the former church and the back of the present large barn to its current location south of the homestead. In early 1915 he dismantled, moved and constructed a massive barn (from near the Gilead line at the Chapman Homestead) to Mayville just west of the main house as a stable for his growing number of horses. This barn still stands and was later moved to its present location nearer the present Bethel airport. Chapman may also have been responsible for the razing of the Old Mayville



Ruth Carver Ames and Florence Hastings during Heritage Day 1976.

MEMBER PROFILE: RUTH CARVER AMES (1903-1985)

Ruth Carver Ames was born in Skowhegan, Maine, May 31, 1903, the daughter of R. Freemont and Winona Polard Homsted. She graduated from Skowhegan High School in 1920 and from Farmington Normal School in 1922.

After teaching a year in Mapleton, she came to Bethel in 1923 to teach in the Brick Grammar School and in 1924 married Irving L. Carver, a prominent Bethel businessman. They had four children: Priscilla, Nancy, Catherine and Irving.

Following her husband's death in 1942, she carried on and expanded his oil business until it was sold to Luce Oil Company in 1960. She married in 1944 Kimball Ames, who survives and at age 94 is the Society's second oldest life member.

Mrs. Ames was a member of the West Parish Congregational Church and the Order of Eastern Star. She was a retired trustee of the Bethel Library Association and was long active in the Rumford Hospital Auxiliary. She was also very involved in several other community organizations and served on the Bethel Planning Board from 1957 to 1969. In 1975 she was named the recipient of the Bethel Chamber of Commerce Senior Citizen's Award.

A life member of the Bethel Historical Society, she was also a generous donor, museum guide and enthusiastic volunteer. All who knew her will long remember her kindness, intelligent good sense and warm personality.

Church, though its demise is uncertain. Photos of Mayville taken in 1927 from the south abutment of the old covered bridge (razed that year before the flood) give no hint of the church. In a taped interview, the late John Harrington stated that parts of the church were used in various Bethel buildings, including the present Hanover Dowell mill building. In any case, it seems probable that the church, long used for fair exhibits, was torn down between the time of Chapman's purchase and 1927. It stood between the present Norseman Inn barn and the home of Floyd Thurston facing present-day U. S. Route 2.

In 1918, "Professor" Chapman sold the Mayville Property and what remained of the fairgrounds to Newell Stowe

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Godwin. Chapman then purchased the W. K. Aston property in nearby Shelburne, N.H., where he resided summers until 1924 when he purchased his last Bethel home, the "Chapman House" on the Bethel Common. As one final note to Chapman's ownership of the Mason homestead, the "Professor" several times allowed Bethel townspeople to use his "picnic grounds" for such things as Fourth of July gatherings. What had for so many years been used by Gould Academy's baseball and football teams and for Bethel sporting events, continued up until Chapman left Bethel for his brief stay in New Hampshire.

As an additional note it should be pointed out that though the Riverside Park Association seems to have ended its existence soon after the 1908 fair, local fairs were held in neighboring villages, most notably West Bethel and Newry Corner, which were successful gatherings sponsored by granges in each place.

Harry King, the former manager of the Prospect Hotel on the village common, purchased the old Mason house in January 1928 from Godwin. It appears, however, that Godwin retained ownership of the former fair grounds and track for in early September of the next year, the *Citizen* announced that Bethel would have its first fair in over twenty years on September 21st. In this newer version of the Bethel town fair were some of the same attractions that had made Riverside Park so popular in its heyday period between 1890 and 1908. There was a large collection of "fakers" as usual, and various livestock exhibits. As well, there were ball games, exhibits of farm produce and band music. This all appeared fortuitous for as one individual wrote in the *Citizen*: "Although several times it has appeared that a local fair might be put on in the last ten years, it never progressed beyond the talking stage, and this year's successful attempt of Mr. Godwin was certainly deserving of the patronage it received." The writer concluded with word of expected improvements of the fairgrounds, including the addition of new buildings.

The fair of 1930 was labeled the "First Annual Bethel Agricultural Fair" and as one person explained, it was the first fair in twenty-two years that had races "and everything." Ball games were held during the September 30th event as well as the usual displays and pulling matches. From newspaper accounts it seems the fairgrounds had been purchased late in 1930 from Godwin by Henry Boyker, who also served as president of the revamped fair association. Meanwhile, the old Mason homestead had been sold by Harry King to Paul Clemens (Seigfried Paul Clemens Schultz). An actor and marionette craftsman, Clemens held shows in the barn of the former Mason property during the fair's operation. Clemens also served as the secretary treasurer of the new fair association and Hugh Thurston held the position of vice-president.

The published schedule for the fair of 1930 reveals a well-organized event which included a parade of old automobiles, pulling events, and bicycle and saddle horse races in the morning, and athletic events, trotting races and ball games in the afternoon. Advertised also were a "local stunt circus," a pet show, and the usual music provided by the Bethel and Dixfield bands. Admission for the fair in 1930 was thirty-five cents for individuals and the same for automobiles parked on the grounds.

In the spring of 1931, Henry Boyker moved the large barn built by "Professor" Chapman a short distance up the North-west Bethel road to its present site (it had not been included in the sale of the Mason house by Newell Stowe Godwin to Harry King). Boyker also had built a high board fence around the fairgrounds, constructed new bleachers and laid out an outdoor dance floor for the upcoming fair. While extra stalls were being

EDITOR'S CORNER

Periodically it has been productive to print a list of needs for the Society's office and museum. The Society could use some metal filing cabinets and typewriter tables. The museum continues to need furnishings from any period prior to 1869. Particularly sought after are chests of drawers, a dry sink, candle sticks, chairs, tables and works of art. Anyone having any of these or other items they think might be appropriate should call or write the Society (207) 824-2908 or P.O. Box 12, Bethel, Maine 04217. All gifts are of course tax deductible.

SRH

built in the relocated barn (for the large number of horses entered in the track events), improvements were going on at the track itself, and a new baseball diamond was being developed. Indeed Henry Boyker had major plans for "Old Riverside Park."

Held over a two-day period during the first week of September, the fair drew large crowds, probably about two thousand. Paul Clemens (who would eventually sell the old Mason house to Boyker who in turn ran it again as a hotel under the name "Bethaven") operated his "Marionette Theatre" during the fair while a race featuring the "World's Smallest Race Horses" took place a short distance away (years earlier, another race was held on the Riverside Park track which featured local work horses).

In late September of 1932 "a few interested citizens" of Bethel gathered to discuss the advisability of holding a fair at Riverside Park. Officers elected were president, Henry Boyker (the owner of the fairgrounds); vice-president, D. Grover Brooks, secretary, Clarence W. Hall; and treasurer, Tom I. Browne. At this same meeting it was decided to adopt the name "Riverside Park Association" which of course, was the name of the original organization to hold fairs here.

Held on October 14th and 15th, the fair featured exhibits by local 4-H groups, as well as large showings by area poultry and cattle owners. In a special edition of the *Citizen* of October 15th articles highlighted the major attractions of the event and according to later editions of the same paper, the races, contests and exhibits were well-balanced although the same could not be said for the receipts and expenditures.

While the agricultural fair of 1932 was probably seen by the *Bethel Citizen*, as a success, the fact that winter meetings of the newly formed association had to be postponed several times for lack of interest forboded the fair's future. In addition, the patterns of people's lives had changed drastically since the early years of the century, so much so that a town-sponsored fair may have been too large an effort for Bethel citizens attempting to survive the nation's worst economic crises - the Great Depression. In any case during February 1933 Henry Boyker was faced with two obstacles - the Androscoggin was progressively eating away at the grove of trees nearest the fair grounds (as well as the nearby cemetery), and the roof of the new exhibition hall, a "temporary structure," had collapsed due to heavy snows. As soon as the weather had improved, Boyker rebuilt the hall; new officers for the association did not surface, however, and the old ones were re-elected.

The fair of 1933 originally planned for August 23-24 was postponed until September 15-16. Though Boyker promised a

huge variety of concessions (mainly those that had recently been at the county fair at Norway/South Paris), as well as rides, horse racing and pulling events, many of the expected attractions did not surface for several reasons. One person wrote in the September 21st *Citizen* of the "small attendance at the Bethel Fair" where "few stood around to watch the races, a few more stood or sat in cars to watch the ball game - the midway had little to offer - kiddy rides, fruit dealers, fortune tellers and three or four eating stands comprised the attractions." Some shows apparently set up tents but didn't open for business, apparently "due to the small crowd."

When the time came for the 1934 event, the newness of the affair, combined with the general lack of spending money probably did much to influence the outcome. Twelve horses, booked for the races were in the Riverside Park stables early on the morning of October 13th when a large snowstorm began. When by the following Monday the snow had changed over to rain, the fate of Bethel's fair had been decided.

There are those whose memories still return, now and again to the time when colorful fairs were held in Bethel's Mayville. For many years the remnants of the revived fair grounds stood idly by, waiting for the encroachment of weeds and general neglect. The judges stand, located not far from the grandstand, was later moved to Paradise Hill to be used as an observation post during World War II. But little remains, except "Professor" Chapman's barn and the historic Mason homestead to recall the days when hooves thundered and crowds cheered at Bethel's Riverside Park.

BOOK REVIEW

Alfred F. Howard, A HISTORY OF HANOVER, MAINE 1774-1980 WITH ASSOCIATED HISTORICAL EVENTS (Manchester, Maine: Alfred F. Howard, 1983) 576 pp., \$35.

Alfred Howard's *A History of Hanover, Maine* provides a useful antidote to the dearth of written works available on this Oxford County town. Hanover was incorporated in 1843, created by joining Howard's Gore and a portion of the town of Bethel north of the Androscoggin River. Howard, a descendant of Phineas Howard, Sr., the original proprietor of the Gore, has completed a labor of love detailing the history and development of this town of 7.53 square miles and a population of some 300 year-long residents. The book has a good number of photographs which provide illuminating insights to the detailed text. There is also a wealth of genealogical data and cemetery records.

This reviewer wishes that the author had read the newspaper items relating to the town from the nineteenth century to the present since these would have greatly enhanced our understanding of Hanover's past. Perhaps that is a project for another day. Nevertheless Mr. Howard did gather much information from the memories of several older residents that has been included in his history. For this contribution, future researchers are likely to be eternally grateful.

Regretfully the book lacks an index which makes it difficult to use and there are errors. But Mr. Howard has produced a history that will be the standard work for some time.

SRH

OUR READERS WRITE

Susan Kalman Flint (Mrs. Frank L. Flint) of Fairfield, Connecticut writes of the first time she saw Bethel:

Frank and I met in 1956 at Oberlin College. We were from two entirely different worlds. My parents had emigrated from Hungary in 1924, and I was born fifteen years later, when they had become quite Americanized. They were fond of traveling, and I had traveled with them a good deal. But I had never been to Maine. Frank and I found a deep common interest in music, and one day he played a recording of THE RAKOCZY MARCH for me. It was the first time I had ever heard this piece of music, which stirs the soul of anyone with the slightest amount of Hungarian blood! Frank always wrote letters to me during college vacations, and the letters were full of descriptions of his life in Bethel on vacations. Amusements were simple, but there was constant mention of activities with his family, especially his mother Leona, and his aunt Bea Brown, who was not yet married to Cecil Conrad.

It was decided that I should be introduced to Bethel, and I made my first trip there in June 1957. I was 19. I took a night train which passed through Bridgeport, Conn., my home town, and stopped at New Haven. I boarded the train there, and was much too excited to fall asleep. I was wearing one of my best dresses, with a crinoline; I had two more crinolines in my suitcase, just in case I should have to dress up.

When we came to Old Orchard Beach, the accent of the conductor changed abruptly. He spoke in the manner of someone from Frank's family, with whom I had spoken briefly on the phone, and whom I could hardly understand, since I

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came from near New York. I straightened myself as best I could, and wondered how I might appear to Aunt Bea and Mr. Conrad, who were to meet me in Portland. It was now 6:30 a.m. I had been on the train since midnight.

Bea and Cecil were awaiting me in the station. They were dressed in their best clothes, and they greeted me with such warmth and gentility that I forgot to be embarrassed by my appearance. Cecil was driving a gray Packard with velour seats, which belonged to Mrs. Fred Lee Edwards, for whom Aunt Bea had been a devoted companion since the age of 16. Mrs. Edwards was to be my hostess. Bea and Cecil chatted with me as we began the drive up Route 26. I soon noticed that this was further out in the country than I had ever been in my entire life. There were miles and miles of pine trees, broken only occasionally by very rural hamlets. I tried to connect Bea and Cecil with this landscape, and with the road, which seemed to be taking us to the remotest end of the world.

Just as I was beginning to panic, we rounded a curve and came over the last hill, and I glimpsed Bethel for the first time. The buildings of Gould Academy and the houses on Church and Broad Streets had the air of not being real. For a moment I thought I had come upon a set from BRIGADOON. It was just too lovely and unspoiled to be true.

As we arrived at the Edwards Homestead, I was ushered into the parlor. Mrs. Susan G. Edwards was seated on an exquisite needlepoint chair. She wore a light gray dress accented by three strands of pearls. Her pure white hair was coiffed in an upsweep. She was, strange to relate, the exact image of my great-grandmother, as my mother had once described her to me. I wondered if I were expected to curtsy, as we were introduced; but she, too, was warm and friendly. On her request, I played the piano for her.

Later, after having met Frank's family, and after resting and freshening up, all of us went to dinner at the Bethel Inn. This was interpreted to me as a state occasion; I was glad that I had brought along an extra crinoline. Cecil drove the Packard up the hill to the Inn. I sat in front with Mrs. Edwards; Frank sat in the back seat, with his mother. Cecil held the door open as we entered the Inn. There were twelve of us at dinner, including Frank's sister Carol (Mrs. Dan Hatch), who was eleven, and Vivian Brown (Mrs. Peter Howard), age 10, and Julia Rose Brown (Mrs. James Bennett), age 12. I noticed with fascination that each hand-painted dinner plate was unique.

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Everything went swimmingly, but everyone was being very quiet, and very careful; that is, until one of the girls spoke.

"Stop that. You're kicking me. What for?" She was addressing her older sister.

The answer came, in a stage whisper.

"You're using the wrong fork. Don't you remember what we learned yesterday?"

A twinkle appeared in someone's eye, and suddenly the ice was broken. And so began my love affair with Bethel which has lasted twenty-eight years.

ADAMS CHRONICLES FILM SERIES

Through a grant from the Maine Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Society was able to host the remaining seven films in the series "The Adams Chronicles" this spring. Based on the Adams Papers, which contain 300,000 pages of letters, diaries and journals written by members of the family, the series weaves together events that shaped the history of the United States and the legacy of this distinguished American family. The films in this portion of the series covered the lives and careers of John Quincy Adams (who served in Congress with Dr. Moses Mason), Charles Francis Adams, Books Adams and his brother Henry Adams.

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